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The Turkish 100 basic pieces in terms of their language and expression

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Abstract

In Turkey, with the circular letter numbered 2005/70 first for high schools and then “100 Primary Books For the Primary School Students” list was specified by the Ministry of National Education. With this list, it was aimed at “creating mutual feelings and a conscious” and “gaining the habit of reading”. The purpose of this study is to analyze this practice at primary school level which is one of the most significant steps of education in terms of “Language and Expression” which is one of the Main Principles of Children’s Literature by considering the items in the circular letter prepared by MNE (Ministry of National Education). “100 Basic Pieces” contain 63 books under “Turkish Literature” title, 7 books under “Books to be Prepared” title and 30 books under “World Literature” title. With the framework of the samples obtained by random choosing method in the ratio of % 20 of each title, 12 books from Turkish Literature, 2 books from The Books to be prepared and 6 books from World Literature were chosen. In accordance with the samples chosen in the framework of “100 Primary Books”, 20 books were analyzed with scanning method. According to this study, 5 books out of 20 were identified as suitable to basic principles of children’s literature in terms of language and expression. In the light of this study, various suggestions that could contribute to a child’s gaining reading culture were set forth.

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1. Introduction

The significant period for an individual to meet education is early childhood and this process reaches to puberty with a sequential structuring. At these periods verbal, visual and written sources are used as effective tools of education. One of the most influential and permanent tools is books from written sources. In this respect, it holds a vital importance that a child gets into a correct interaction with books via education. The main purpose of this study is to identify how “Language and Expression” which is one of the basic principles of children’s literature that makes it possible to build a bridge between a child and a book with the most appropriate way is structured in the books of the list “100 Basic Pieces Books”.

2. The basic qualifications that children’s literature works should carry

20 books determined with the help of the samples obtained from the list of “The Turkish 100 Basic Pieces” were examined in terms of “Language and Expression” which is one of the basic principles of children’s literature. The basic principles of children’s literature are these: 1. Theme 2. Subject 3. Language and Expression 4. Characters 5. Message 6. Atmosphere 7. Pedagogic Principles.

a. Language and expression

After the first interaction with the cover of the book, the relation that a reader builds with a book is the language of written text. The works which make a reader feel the expression power and beauty of Turkish language, enable to learn new vocabulary and are written with child reality are qualified stimulus that are suitable to the meaning world of a child.

Language is a process which is started at birth and continues through life. Language is a significant element in the process of gaining self identity. Because of this, language development occurs more in environments that have rich and plentiful stimuli in terms of communication. In this respect, it is necessary to create environments in which children live through various experiences by means of language (Dilidüzgün, 2003; Gander & Gardiner, 2007; Güven & Bal, 2004; Piaget, 2007; Weigel, Lowman & Sally, 2007; Yılmaz, 2009). In order for that, for children gaining a reading culture depends on not only meeting them with books suitable for their age and development characteristics (İnce Samur, 2011) but also creating language and expression in books with the reality of children.

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3. Method

“100 Basic Pieces” contain 63 books under “Turkish Literature” title, 7 books under “Books to be Prepared” title and 30 books under “World Literature” title. With the framework of the samples obtained by random choosing method in the ratio of % 20 of each title, 12 books from Turkish Literature, 2 books from The Books to be prepared and 6 books from World Literature were chosen. In accordance with the samples chosen in the framework of “100 Primary Books”, 20 books were analyzed with scanning method. In this study, qualifications of the works in terms of language and expression are examined with the witness of these questions:

Is it regarded to use short and simple sentences in the expression of the books?/ Are punctuation marks and grammatical rules of Turkish used properly in the expression of the books?/ Is the vocabulary potential (items such as words, idioms, terms, word patterns, proverbs and reduplications), expression power and possibilities of Turkish implicated to children with literary fictions as appropriate to the development characteristics of children?/ Is the expression built with sentences which emulate children to use Turkish properly and effectively?” (Sever, 2007b, p. 55).

4. Findings and comment

In this part, 20 books which were chosen randomly from the list of 100 Turkish Basic Pieces are analyzed in terms of language and expression.

4.1. *Motherland or Silistre (Namık Kemal)*

While the book is built on sentences that have strong emotional bases, fictions which enable children to develop ideas and sensitivity are not included in the book. Vocabulary potential, expression power and possibilities of Turkish are not implicated to children with literary fictions appropriate to the developmental characteristics of children. Despite using an emotional language, the beauty of Turkish language and feelings, ideas of the expression do not contain qualifications that children can emulate. In short, because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.2. *The Childhood of Ömer (Muallim Naci)*

The writer uses a plain, simple and every day language and shares the events with readers as if they sit and listen to him. Preferring simple present tense narration in the book provides an easy reading process. Vocabulary potential, expression power and possibilities of Turkish are implicated to children with literary fictions appropriate to the developmental characteristics of children. For instance, detailed descriptions in narration draw attention of readers. The writer gave detailed description of his father’s personal and physical characteristics whom he loved and respected more. The writer narrates many characteristics of his father at the text titled as “My father was a great man”. As a general analyze of the book, its language and expression are positive formally but in terms of content and narration style it does not contain proper feelings and ideas that can enable children to gain sensitivity. In short, because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.3. *Şermin (Tevfik Fikret)*

What draws attention in expression is that the sentences are short, comprehensible and plain. In the narration of the book, it’s identified that grammatical rules and punctuation marks of Turkish are used properly. On the other hand, the world of the child is narrated to readers with respect to the principle of suitability to children. Love, excitement in the language of a child, talking without thinking sometimes and restlessness about life sometimes are displayed in the poems.

Come on sister, let’s play./ Let’s play, but let me for a few minutes./ Alright, but come quickly!/I’m here....Where shall we start?/ Blind man’s buff. – No, Hide and seek/ is better. – No, “it” is better(p.73).

Vocabulary potential, expression power and possibilities of Turkish are implicated to children with literary fictions appropriate to the developmental characteristics of children. Instant excitements, deciding processes, enthusiasm and fun between two children are reflected realistically. There are many reduplications in the book. Stature, the neck is so thin, they bend in full flood (p. 33), once you get close she became crimson (p. 40), we are hungry at home all the family (p. 66). Seasons, for example, are written by being handled one by one in poems and they are both used as metaphors and personification elements. In the poems titled as “Grandma Summer”, “Aunt Fall” and “Father Winter”, as it can be understood from the titles, seasons are written as using metaphors and personification. As general narration, it includes sentences which children emulate to use Turkish properly and effectively. In short, because of these reasons it is a book to be recommended for children.

4.4. *Golden Light (Ziya Gökalp)*

The main point that should be paid attention for books addressing children is that there must not be any grammatical mistake absolutely. In the book “Golden Light”, there are grammatical mistakes starting from the first page. The title of the epic Alp Arslan is written as “Alp Arsaln” in a wrong way. Without any doubt books are the source that children get in contact with outside the class one-to-one. In order for children to reach a level that they can identify and distinguish right and wrong precisely, there should be no place for such careless approaches. The language of the narration is not fluent and easily comprehensible. Generally considering, the language and expression in the book is not built on sentences which children emulate to use Turkish properly and effectively. In short, because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.5. *Lonely Swashbuckler (Ömer Seyfettin)*

There are many grammatical mistakes in the short novel “Lonely Swashbuckler”. As general there should be a unity and coherence in expression. In the book vocabulary potential, expression power and possibilities of Turkish are not built on literary fiction appropriate to the developmental characteristics of children. In short, because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.6. *The Cloud In Love (Nazım Hikmet)*

In the tale “The Cloud In Love” the writer Nazım Hikmet makes short sentences. So that the events and conversations are comprehended easily. “A tale is generally structured with short action sentences and transfer of culture to next generations is carried out by means of language” (Sever, 2003; Gamble & Yates, 2010; Shaffer, 1999). For example, “*Ayşe Girl has sent a kiss to the cloud with her finger tips. When the kiss of Ayşe Girl reached to the cloud, the cloud got surprised. But then it recovered itself, and got the shape of a very big rose*” (Hikmet, 2004, p. 12).

12 font size letters which are suitable for primary school students are used. This enables readers to read and follow easily. Between realities and a tale world, an environment that is close to reality is created. It is such an environment that one can go into the fantastic and boundless fiction of this tale world without breaking connection with reality. “With their perfect fictional form, nursery rhymes of the tale play the role of a stimulus which operates a child’s visual and auditory perceptions, develops imaginary language skills” (Sever, 2003, p. 142). In the tale, as a sign of its love to Ayşe Girl, the cloud sings lullabys getting into the shape of a “saz”. By reading tales that have such qualities to pre-school period children, first steps of the interaction between a child and a book are built. In order to draw the attention of primary school and secondary school students into these events and guide them, it is a positive approach to make sentences as if there is a story-teller. In short, because of these reasons it is a book to be recommended for children.

4.7. *Arithmetic Good Birds Are Excellent (Cemal Süreya)*

“In the books, children should be made feel the rich expressional possibilities of Turkish; with an approach that develops a child’s language admiration, there must be a vivid language style which addresses five senses” (Sever, 1995, p. 15). In the book the writer, having such an approach, uses a language as if he talks directly to children. His expressions are plain and fluent. When the reader holds the books in his hands, he meets a vivid language style which is as it if addresses to a friend and nearly he becomes a commutual of the text. So that child-book interaction which is brought by aesthetic concerns is provided on a natural process.

In the expression, there are metaphors and also personifications. For example, at his writing *Dark Blue Helicopter*, by stating that “if you attach glasses to a lettuce, his picture shows up” information about the character in the book is given by using metaphors. It is more common to see personification in the writing “*Cities At Christmas*”. For example, “There was a castle in Kars. It was a historian. He always got full grades...”, “In Trabzon the shore was silent and so isolated. A small sailing boat was continuously sloshing on water. He said “Thanks God” “there is moonlight tonight; I’m celebrating christmas with it.” (Süreya, 1995, pp. 43-44). While thinking City of Kars and the small sailing boat sloshing on the shore as human beings, using the art of personification, variety and richness in expression is provided. So that it can be said that the expression in the book is built on sentences that children emulate to use Turkish properly and effectively. Also in the expression of the book, grammatical rules and punctuation marks are all used correctly. In short, because of these reasons it is a book to be recommended for children.

4.8. *Captain Halime (Rıfat Ilgaz)*

In the novel narrative expression is used. The writer Rıfat Ilgaz narrated and turned Captain Halime whom he knew closely at his childhood into a novel character in his book. His expression is plain, simple and fluent. “...In order for a work to be read by many people, its language should be understood by many people. For this reason, the language should have a characteristic that everybody can understand easily and should be a common one” (Kavcar, 1999, p. 46). In the novel, one can come across lots of terms which are used by the people in maritime business. For instance, terms like *firfament*, *boom*, *great titmouse*, *to unfurl*. These terms may cause the reader to become stranger to the subject because of being used too often. Including short explanations at the end of the pages at which these terms take place helps the reader to be knowledgeable and gain familiarity with the subject. As a general view of the book, it is built on sentences which children emulate to use Turkish properly and effectively. In short, because of these reasons it is a book to be recommended for children.

4.9. *The Adventures of İnci (Orhan Kemal)*

The language and expression in the book is not treated so as to support the conceptual development of children and gain sensitivity to them. On the contrary, words which damage the emotional and intellectual world of the reader, which are rude and humiliating dominate to the whole book. İnci is looked down on in all terms and is accused of being a thief by her family. Whereas, her only purpose is to feed her cat which has given birth. The child’s wish to gain responsibility and sense of belonging is obstructed completely. İnci being is perceived as a crime object, in other words starting the process of self-realization such as receiving the approval of the society and being accepted within seems impossible on these terms. Including a book which is built on wrong ideas and full of grammatical mistakes into the list of basic pieces is though to be a greater mistake. In short, because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.10. *Bastinado (Falaka) (Ahmet Rasim)*

The language of the writer is plain, simple, comprehensible and sincere. So that reading and following the subject easily is ensured. However, it is not built on sentences that emulate children to use Turkish properly and effectively. These are the examples of sentences which lack of emotions, ideas and love: “The cells were so narrow that the child could only sit by raising his legs straight up. There was a round, narrow hole right up them. *The guilty boy* was brought here by the jail guardian, stuck into one of these cells and the door was closed” (Rasim, 2005: 78). Besides, these sentences set an example to the fact that the child is sentenced to an inhumane punishment called cell imprisonment upon being considered as guilty due to a mistake he had done. These behaviours are negative approaches that should not be included in children’s books. In short, because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.11. *The Anthology of Homeland Poems (Collected by Bilge Ekinici)*

The poems have a heavy expression in general. In order to resolve the message in the poems, the deep emotions and thoughts given should be interpreted. Being on the level of readiness in emotional terms as well as knowing the meanings of the words given are required in order for that. However, the heavy style of the language and the fact that Turkish words were not used sets a difficulty for the reader. This book, which is recommended particularly within the scope of 100 Basic Pieces, stands distant from the urge to set a reading culture for the child. In parallel to this, the reader can also have difficulty in understanding the poems owing to the words, meanings of which are unknown. As a conclusion, it can be deduced that the expression does not structurally consist of sentences that would emulate children to use Turkish correctly and effectively. In short, because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.12. *The Guest from God (Resat Nuri Guntekin)*

“The Guest from God” consists of short, comprehensible and simplistic sentences. “Clarity, fluency, unambiguity, clarity, simplicity and personalism” should be perceived as the principal conditions to create a fine and effective style” (Sever, 1995: 15). This piece titled as “The Guest from God” consists of these characteristics. The variety in the expression gives opportunity for the expression to invigorate and deepen. However, the abstract ideas in the text may cause difficulty in interpretation for a primary school student who is at the period of concrete ideas. In short, because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.13. *Selections from Turkish proverbs*

Saying with a deep meaning which is anonymous and uttered upon long term experiences and observations (Dil Derneği). The book consists of proverbs listed from A to Z. It includes various subjects on life and human. There are various stimuli, from child to elderly and from animate to inanimate. One can also encounter different sayings of proverbs which have the same meaning. For example, “Whatever one does, he does that (deed) to himself”: (see As you sow, so you shall reap) / “The heart stands looking upon another”: (see: There is a path from a heart to another). In general, this is a book that can be turned to learn the collective cultural knowledge and accumulation. It should be included in the libraries as a complementary and assisting book for the child during the process of education. However, it cannot be considered in the least of children’s literature artwork. In short, because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.14. *Selections from Turkish quatrains*

Quatrains is the shortest form of verse in folkloric poetry. The first issue that raises attention in the book is the characteristic of the principle emotions aimed to be delivered. In this context, the quatrains should also be studied in terms of the quatrains’ understanding of subjectivity to the child. The quatrains may create implications of love, jealousy, sarcasm, satire, anger, lament, emotional complexity in the mind. However, these elements do not consist of characteristics that can contribute to the qualifications of perceptual and mental development or primary school students. For instance, *A bowl was broken in the brook/ The boy fell in love with the girl/ No matter how the boy says he doesn’t want/ The girl embraces his neck* (p. 9). In general the expression style in the book is far from having stimuli towards the skills of understanding and uttering. Not only it doesn’t have an approach in its expression that is suitable for a child but also it doesn’t contain sentences which include emotions and ideas with that a child can gain sensitivity and internalize. In short because of these reasons it’s not a book to be recommended for children.

4.15. *My Sweet Orange Tree (Jose Mauro De Vasconcelos)*

The writer created the story of the book inspiring from his own life. Because of this, one can encounter a sincere and intimate style just like reading someone’s diary. On the other hand, while considering some utterances and ideas, it can be seen that there are sentences which can also affect the child reader in a negative way mentally and perceptually. For example, “Zeze, stop believing everything he says. Uncle Edmundo is a mad man; and also a liar sometimes.”, “What if I die?... I will be dead before getting a Christmas present this year” (Vasconcelos, 2000, p. 41). Because of these reasons, it should be paid attention to the principle of appropriateness to children in language and expression, and there must be no words in the books for children which are not suitable to a child’s conceptual and emotional world. The book also contains some positive expressions. For example,

“...you are the best person in the world. Nobody rebukes me when I am with you and I can feel that ‘the sunlight fills my heart with happiness’” (Vasconcelos, 2000, p. 145 / 10).

Besides, the conversations that Zeze had on his own with the sweet orange plant are significant in terms of language development. Also, from the friendship he had with a bat that is another living being in the nature we can see that Zeze is a child who has language sensitivity and uses his imaginative power in an unlimited way. In general it is determined that the expression of the book is built on sentences which children can emulate to use Turkish properly and effectively. In short, because of these reasons it is a book that can be recommended for children.

4.16. *Alice in Wonderland (Lewis Carroll)*

Present continuous and past tenses were used in the expression. There are many mistakes in terms of grammar and punctuation marks. The disorder which is felt in the content also reflects to language and expression. Besides these mistakes being mentioned in terms of sentence writing and grammar, there is no unity and completeness in expression. The reader is also thrown here and there with Alice, and the emotions and ideas which were planned to sense do not reach their purpose. As a general analyze of the book, the expression of it is far from having the ability to sense the power and beauty of Turkish to children. In short because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.17. *The Travels of Gulliver (J. Swift)*

The expression contains short and simple sentences and in general it includes words that express action. For instance, “As soon as I landed on the island a crowd gathered around me. They glanced at me with a strange look. Oh My God! I have never seen such weird people: Their clothes, faces, behaviors... it was worth to see! (Swift: 1975, p. 161)”. However as a general analyze of the book, because including a book which was not written for children in a list of children books doesn’t contribute to sensitivity development of a child, it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.18. *Selections From Andersen Tales*

The expression is built on short utterances which state judgements suitable to the events that change quickly. Past continuous tense narration which is used generally in tales draws attention. The events is narrated with the language style of the writer. For example, Finger Girl cured the injured wing of the swallow. When it is spring time, the swallow is cured completely. To the girl: I want to go to my friends living in hot countries, it said” (Andersen, 1976, p. 55). In general the expression is not built on sentences which children can emulate to use Turkish properly and effectively. In short because of these reasons it’s not a book to be recommended for children.

4.19. *What Men Live By? (Tolstoy)*

In the book language potential, expression power and possibilities of Turkish is tried to sense to the children by using literary fictions which are suitable to the developmental characteristics of children. Conversations suitable to the events and situations, inner talks and descriptions can be seen. For example, in the story named “On What A Man Lives?”, the inner voice of the shoemaker called Simon when he met a half naked man, and the narrator in descriptive narration were stated. “What are you doing Simon?” he said to himself. “Maybe the man is dying in despair, and you are thinking of fear. Have you become rich enough to be afraid of thieves? Ah Simon, shame on you!” He turned back and started to walk towards the man (Tolstoy, 2004: 12).

“As the main element of writing is sentence, the style of making sentences determines the characteristics of writing style most” (Kavcar & Oğuzkan, 1999, p. 47). It is seen that the writer utters short and clear sentences. So, easily comprehending and following the subject is provided. However, when considering the content of the subjects, it draws attention that it is not appropriate for primary and secondary school students which are at the suggested age level. In short, because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

4.20. *Pollyanna (Elenor H. Porter)*

As the novel is full of heavy emotions in terms of its subject and content, this situation also reflects to the style. Although its language is comprehensible and in an every day style, a deep emotional complexity is felt in expression. Pollyanna is mature which is not an expected behaviour at her age, responsible and tolerant. An idealized human figure is drawn and all responsibilities end in Pollyanna character. Pollyanna is neither a child nor an adult in terms of its language and expression. With all these qualifications stuck on her Pollyanna is a person living in role complexity.

While being a child living in pangs of conscience, she becomes a person who is mature that is not expected at her age... In this respect, it can’t be said that there is a balance in expression. As a result, language potential, expression power and possibilities of Turkish is not sensed to children with literary fictions. In the book, when considering mental and perceptual development process of children, it is seen that there are sentences and views which have negative affects. In short, because of these reasons it is not a book to be recommended for children.

5. Conclusion

In accordance with the samples chosen from 100 Basic Pieces, 20 works were examined by scanning method. Although the pieces were chosen randomly, it was paid attention to include different literary forms such as novel, short story, tale, poem and essay in these 20 works. according to the study, 5 pieces out of 20 that were examined are found to be suitable in terms of language and expression which children's literature works should carry. These are "Şermin", "The Cloud In Love", "Arithmetic Good Girls Are Excellent", "Captain Halime" and "Sweet Orange". Other 15 books out of 20 were determined as unsuitable for the basic principles of children's literature. These books which are included in this list prepared for primary school children were proven not to address the goals of the circular letter published by MNE.

6. Suggestions

It is expected that a practice especially at the preparation period should be prepared considering all the stimuli. If it is the desire to have a scientific understanding, to service properly for the children who are the future of our country and to reach the goals defined in the circular letter, creating possibilities for constituting love for books in children should be the starting point. The goal should be not only creating qualified books for children but also looking for approaches that can have this quality at the interaction between child and book.

At long term, in the framework of the question "What should be done in order to raise child readers and create a conscious of reading culture in child in Turkey?"; competitions, semposiums, panel discussions, congresses at which many suggestions for solution are brought forth can be held by science committees consisting of experts at their branches. Because, it was proven with "100 Basic Pieces" that the lists prepared in short terms cause only the loss of time, source and effort again in short terms. Suggestion for solution in short term brought forth by considering these reasons is that this list which was limited with a number and prepared without thinking about quality should not be in use.

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